MATURE RELIGION

Several weeks ago, we discussed "Nursery Room Religion", and I promised then that I wanted to speak to you a little later on the subject of "Mature Religion". You will remember that we discussedtwo different types of religion. One type I called the demand type--that is, nursery room--in which the individual insists that what he wants he must get; that what he wants is right. The other I called, and I must confess a very poor name, conformity type. This we identified as mature religion, for it meant that the individual, recognizing his proper place in the scheme of things, did not insist that he receive certain specified benefits and privileges, but, rather, he said, "Granted God's existence. I shall do all I can to discover it and to know all I can about its nature, and then I shall trust myself to an obedience to that will, cost what it may."

I want to bring you ten different characteristics of mature religion. I would like you to remember as many as you can, but I would like very much more to think that the discussion of each one would be a little prod; to your own thinking. But I should be more than pleased if each person found only one of the ten marks worth further consideration. I am sure, however, that each one of the ten will be a conviction in some degree against each one of us. It will be a sign of your maturity how many of them you really find to be a condemnation as part of yourself though, of course, some will affect you more than others.

First of all, mature religion is a "this world religion" as opposed to faith and confidence governing action with regard to another world. I mean--but I said it very poorly--I am not opposing faith in another world, except insofar as faith in another world precludes your one hundred per cent interest and activity in this world. Anything other than a whole-hearted concern for this world is immature. It dates back a long way to the infancy of our race. I said last week, and I hole to it, that we are still just out of the jungle and babes in arms; but considering how far we have come, this idea of the confidence in another world that has generated ninety-nine per cent of the interest in religion is a very immature and primitive notion. I am not denying that there may be another world. I am simply saying that while we are here, this is what should concern us. The other need not be our concern at all. In the first place, we can know nothing about it; and in the second place, we can do nothing about it, except live to the full what there is here.

Secondly--this is not so certain, and I put it in tentatively--the mature person has a confidence in the natural as opposed to the supernatural. Now that is a hope and a dream, and I am sure that it will some day be the case. It follows logically from the first that we will begin to place our faith in religion in naturalism, and we will have confidence that the laws of this world, being the laws of our existence, are all that we need to know for our salvation. They are all that we need to know for anything, because they are the only things that we can know. And so, with the abandonment of another world as the dominating conception, making this world just a vehicle of transportation to some other realm--with the abandonment of that--will come the abandonment of our confidence in supernaturalism and the miraculous; and co-incident with that, an ever greater knowledge and appreciation of the richness and the value that lies at our feet in this life if only we would turn our eyes from the too distant future to look for it and to utilize it.

Now we come to the third mark, and this is a very important one. We, in maturity, will place our confidence in beliefs that can be tested, rather than in those beliefs and ideas that we want to have. I mentioned this necessity in a previous sermon. We will place our confidence in beliefs that may and can be tested by evidence, not in things that we want to believe. Now, that's costly.

It hurts. When you have something that you grew up with, and it means to you the warmth of your childhood religion; when it is what your mother and father believed; when it is that in which you must believe in order to be respected, it is hard to give it up. You will suffer. I have watched fellows suffering this thing. I have watched men and women suffering. Most of them do not go far enough. They are not mature enough to take that suffering, and so they turn back, turn back to the things that please and to the comfort that they have known and to the old familiar as that which they want. In order to base your religion upon evidence, you are going to have to strip yourself to fighting weight. You are going to have to be prepared to suffer a little. The mo important the other beliefs were to you, the more you will suffer. The more sensitive you are, the more it will hurt. It is a mark of maturity as to how much suffering you can take in the process of carrying out what you believe.

Another mark of maturity is the ability of the individual to criticize and appraise himself, his ideas, his group, church, yes, even his culture. The mature person can do that. The mature person must do that. I will put it even more strongly. In order to be genuinely religious, you must be able to do this. It will hurt, and there aren't very many of us capable of doing it, but it must be done. The deeper and broader you go for your basis of criticism, the more difficult it will be.

You can sometimes criticize your group, because the ideas that you have are created and formed by your group. A great philosopher and psychologist has said that we do not think as individuals. We think as members of groups, and your ideas are those of your group. It may be an economic group or it may be a political group. It may be a social circle group. It may be an intellectual group or a labor group or a business group.

There are hundreds of cross-sections, but our ideas are those of a group. Part of our cultural weakness lies in the fact that we are in so many different groups; and we carry so many of the ideas of each of them. But if a person were skillful enough, he could take an idea, and he could tell you to whom it belonged. One could even develop that skill sufficiently to be able to place ideas the way you place paintings. An expert says, such and such a painting is by such and such a person, of such and such an age, and it may belong to an age long past. Our ideas are subject to the same kind of pressure and classification. Needless to say, it is very difficult to rise above such group pressure to the point of being able to criticize it.

How many people do you know who have ever voted for anything that would really hurt them personally? I doubt if I know enough people to name on the fingers of one hand. A simple question: How many people have ever voted for a party or a candidate that would hurt them personally? There we see in the beginning our incapacity to judge and to appraise and to criticize ourselves and our groups and parties. We think as groups. We are always pressuring for group objectives. Our government is made up of pressure groups. That is the way it operates and functions. People go on blindly fighting within their own little groove and circle. It is no wonder that we are talking about class welfare. It is no wonder that the people who know best say that we are in for some terrible times in this country because so very few of us are religious enough, or mature enough in our religion, to be able to find a basis of judgment that transcends our personal interests. God ceases to mean anything to us except as we are able to bring Him in to help our side. You see the utter degradation of this thing. That is what we are doing nationally. That is why I insist here in this pulpit on criticizing you--oh, no, not <u>you</u>--criticizing

us in our most vital areas, knowing that when I say things that are good about our enemy, it hurts you people whose children are fighting for us; but it must be done. If we can grow enough in our knowledge of God and in our devotion to Him, we will overcome these things that now defeat and destroy us.

The fifth mark of maturity is the attitude that you have toward your groups. I am not sure how important this is. As I develop this theme now, I am losing a little confidence in the logic of my procedure; but it is not important anyway, one way or the other. This is, however, vital to some of us: The mature person's attitude toward his group. I am thinking now, particularly, of his religious group. How do you regard the body of the Church to which you belong? Is it a medium of self-glorification? Is it? It is for a lot of people--and in this church, with our past trouble, one has occasion to see some of that--to whom was this church group a means of personal prestige and pride so that when it didn't agree with them, they had to leave. Ah, I have watched church workers for some years now. You watch for yourself those to whom their labor is a way of building themselves up. You see others who are working to do what they can to further this thing that they believe in. The mature person's group is always just a better way of giving expression to the loyalty that he has, and of finding more of the values that he wants. I don't mean to say that any group you belong to has thereby got you for life, and that you can't ever leave it. The principle is this: Now yourself, not the group, but what you can do for that which both you and the group are supposed to be serving. Whenever any group becomes a matter of pride in itself, becomes a closed corporation, becomes a something going down channels that you know are just for glorification and not for service, then your loyalty should not be there, but somewhere else where the thing that you wanted originally to serve may still be served.

The sixth mark of maturity is the acceptance of the disciplines necessary for growth. Any time you decide to move out from the belief and idea that you like which is precious and important, to one that is larger and better you will experience suffering. In order to make the transition, you must be willing to subject yourself to the disciplines of growth. That takes a lot of effort. It takes a great deal of attention and concern. It requires an investigation of the nature of the thing that you are looking for and of that which you want to be, so that you are willing to pay the price of growth. Any educational process takes discipline. There is a custom in our religion to think there isn't any discipline, or else to think that it consists of the trivial learning of catechisms and methods of procedure. Isn't it surprising that, by and large, men have the notion religion doesn't take any effort? Isn't it a condemnation of our culture, that we should consider religion easy?

Another mark of maturity is the willingness to accept responsibility; responsibility for other people; responsibility for mankind; responsibility for the promises, oaths and obligations that you make as an individual or inherit as a member of a family or society. This type of obligation no one can lay upon you; you find it for yourself--responsibility for doing all the good that you can do; for promoting all the good that you can; and for fighting all the evil that you can. That is a large order. You see it is so large that there is no one who can sit in judgment on you, no one who can tell you that you are not doing it. There is the pitfall, and that is why the kind or religion that I am preaching to you, the kind of religion I think of as mature religion is so hard, because you are your own judge--just you and God--and it is so easy to cheat. The mature person--he is always one of the great persons in society--is the one who accepts his responsibility.

The eighth mark is concerned with our reactions to crises. This is very important. The mark of the mature person is the way he reacts to crises. (I want to preach a sermon on this sometime.) When a crisis comes in your life--and it is coming to more and more of you daily; and it will come, not only in the loss of your loved ones, but in this terrible social conflict that is about to fall on us--yes, it is here now, what do you do with it? The mature person never walks out from under them. And mark you, there are lots of ways of walking out from under them. One of them is to get tired. Another is to be overcome with grief. Another is to feel that the burden is too much for you. Another is to feel that you can't do anything about it. Another is to feel that the damage is done. Another is to feel that God will look after it. Ah, there are dozens more ways of walking around them, and getting out from under.

Does a crisis mean to you an opportunity of disaster, or, using the same term, an opportunity for greater knowledge of God? Every crisis has two faces, one of which is disaster, and the other opportunity for knowledge of God. The mature person never cries too much about his crises. He takes them as the best opportunities he will ever have for changing some of the things that have been wrong in his life, and for grasping more of the goodness of life than he ever had before, because now his old set and mechanical routine is torn up, and he has a chance to plant new seed. I suppose you can tell the mature person better in a crisis than at any other time.

The ninth mark is the way in which you take failure and success. What is your attitude toward failure and success? Does failure mean that you are down? You have seen people beaten down. You have seen unfortunate suicides and those who have gone on living a living death. They failed, and their failure beat them. Failure only beats a person who has never found God. Failure only beats an immature person, in the same way that success only destroys an immature person, because he has a false standard of what is failure and what is success. What do you mean by failure? What is failure? Lost your money? Lost your loved one? Your pride is hurt? You couldn't keep the pace? You weren't as good as something you had created? You had lost the respect of your fellowmen? Go on down the long lists. What does any one of them mean? Nothing, except an overmuch concern with yourself, selfishness and pride. No wonder one of the greatest etchicists in this Country and in the world today makes pride the original sin.

The same thing is true about success. What do you mean by a success? Ah, you made more money. You have more friends--you think. You can go more places. You can attract more people to church. You put your church on a better financial basis than it was. You built a bigger church. You win a war. You win a football game. These are things that we count success, and they are all personal prides--most of them, if not all of them. That is one of our troubles as Americans, size and quantity, with no regard for quality at all.

What is the use of a big church? I try to bring these discussions down to a personal point of view whenever I can. The only use of a big church is that you have an opportunity to do much more good--if what you have to say is of any value at all--just an opportunity of doing more good; that's all. For the most part, big churches lose that opportunity and destroy it in the very nature of size, for unless the basic goodness of God becomes more important to people, it doesn't matter whether they are in this kind of a building, or in a shack on the corner. That is the only thing, and you see, we don't have that criterion of success in our minds. You have to probe around to find it instead of having it there as a commonsense matter, obvious to all, governing all the things that we do, our choices and our moods, our elations and our failures. No, our standard of judgment rests in the opinions of the crowd. What happened to me in the eyes

of the other people. We build ourselves up by knocking others down. That is why I said last week, and I want to say again now--whether it belongs here or not--no Christian, no mature religious person ever thanks God for things he has because other people don't have them. Our maturity must go all the way through every part of our life. If this is necessary, is it any wonder that we are face to face with catastrophy because we aren't religious enough?

And now, the tenth mark of maturity, and I sum them all up in this one, because I have been saying this right along: The mark of religious maturity is your complete devotion to God, and not to anything created by God or yourself. It is your devotion to the Source of all value, not to any particular value. That is a simple statement. Do you get it? Your devotion to the Creative Source of all good things, not your devotion to any one good thing or any collection of good things, or all the good things you know. It is to the Creative Source, because if you have that, you could sweep all the rest away, and you would still have all that you need. That is why we ask, "Why should a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" It is no good. But, if you lose the whole world and still have your own soul, you have everything, because you can build another world. I scarcely know a person--I probably know one or two, and I mean that actually, one or two people who really live that way. Isn't that a terrible thing to say? Oh, I suppose it is not so terrible. As long as there are some who grasp the significance and the importance of that kind of life, and try to live that way; as long as we are trying, we will get there. So, through these coming days, you don't have to worry because you were Republican and the Democrats won. You don't have to worry for fear collectivism will come. You don't have to be worrying about the dislocation of your business and industry. You don't have to be worrying about the development of these super-bombs and bombers. You don't have to be worrying about your pride and your reputation. You don't have to be worrying about your possessions. You have to be concerned only with understanding the Creative Source of all the good things you want to preserve, because if you have that, you won't lose the good things. If you do not have that, you will destroy yourself along with all the valves you want to save.

The "Devil" came to Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, and Jesus, talking to Himself and to God, trying to determine what He wanted to do in life, said to Himself: "Do you want to have all these material possessions? You can have them; just worship them. But there came another voice from within; 'Have no other god before Me.'" And the "Devil" went away. Jesus said to himself: "Do you want to have power? Do you want to be able to do anything that you would like to be able to do? Then just want it, seek for it, and you will have it. But the other voice came again. 'Don't worship anything other than Me.'" And the "Devil" went away. And Jesus said to Himself: "Do you want to have all these kingdoms of the world at your feet? You can have them you know, if you want them. But again came the insistent voice: 'No, don't have any other god before Me.'" And the "Devil" went away, and Jesus gave Himself to God and His will, and only that.

Shadrach, Meshac, and Abednego could have avoided the fire of the furnace, but they said, "No, we will worship God no matter what happens."

Joe was downcast and defeated, oppressed and a failure, but he said, "Even though God slay me, yet will I truth in Him."

Jesus wanted to get away from the torture of His death, but He said, "No, not My will, but Thine."

The secret of salvation, the secret of mature religion is that if you believe in God as the source of all goodness, and really give yourself to him,

nothing can hurt you in any vital way. Though the mountains be cast into the sea, and though the earth be removed, it will not destroy you. Though pestilence walk in darkness, and destruction rage in the daytime, it will not destroy you. No matter what happens around you or to you, you will nevertheless stand triumphant for your life is set in God and nothing can touch that.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.

That is all we need.